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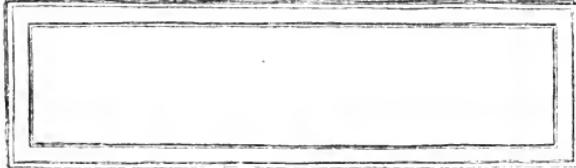
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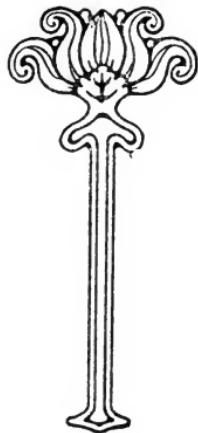
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THE HISTORY OF TRADE  
UNIONISM AMONG WOMEN  
IN BOSTON.

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# THE HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM AMONG WOMEN IN BOSTON.



PUBLISHED BY  
THE WOMEN'S TRADE UNION LEAGUE  
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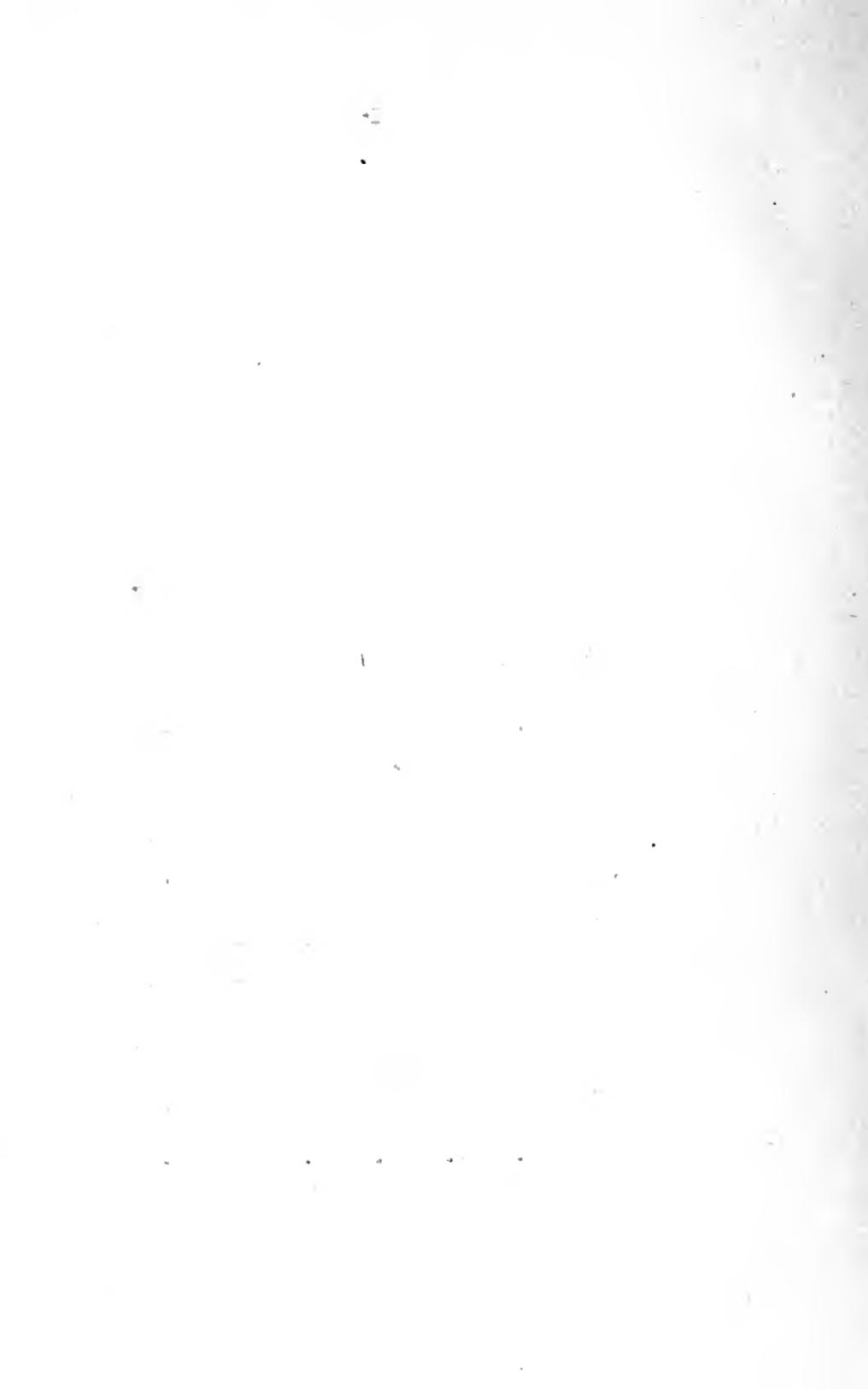
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# THE HISTORY OF TRADE UNIONISM AMONG WOMEN IN BOSTON.

A Report to the Executive Committee of the Women's Trade Union League of Massachusetts.

## INTRODUCTION.

That the working woman has an industrial problem of her own quite apart from that which the workingman has to face, is well recognized, and indeed it is a commonplace to say that women, more frequently than men, work for low wages, long hours and under unsanitary conditions. Without discussing this problem in a large way, it has seemed worth while to raise the question, how far is trade unionism a means of solving the problem or any part of it? How much has been accomplished in the past? How much of promise does it hold for the future?

In attempting an answer, it seemed best to present an accurate account, so far as it could be obtained, of trade unionism as it exists and as it has existed among the women of this city. The facts have been stated impartially if sympathetically in the belief that nothing can be more illuminating than such a statement and in order that these facts may be judged—if need be—from varied points of view. A preliminary word of comment is, perhaps, necessary to point out how far the trade union question for women is different from the same question for men, and why the movement for women, has been so belated.

There is one “primary explanation” for the fact that women are underpaid, over-worked, and victims of unsanitary conditions. They are, for the most part, untrained workers, and because of this and of certain custom-imposed limitations regarding what is called “women’s work,” there is a great over-supply of labor in the occupations which are open to them. Trade unionism among women, therefore, presents itself as one phase of the problem of the organization of unskilled labor, and it must in all fairness then be asked: Is trade unionism the best method of helping women who are unskilled and for whom the field of employment is limited?

This question can be fairly answered only if we recognize that there is seldom a single direct solution to any social problem. Instead there is the solution for the future which must come slowly as prejudices are overcome; but while we are waiting for this, a temporary solution, a solution of expediency can often be found, which will mitigate if it cannot remove, some evils that confront us. Thus it is quite obvious that the working woman's problems can be solved for the future by giving her industrial training and widening her field of employment, just as the economist would solve the problem of the unskilled laborer by making him efficient and thereby making fewer of him.

But this does not help the two million women who are in industry today. Their time for serving apprenticeships has long gone by, trade schools are not for them, and the widening of the field of employment must come too slowly ever to make their "looking for jobs" any easier. For these women, organization is the only way out. It may not offer the final solution, but it is the only immediately practicable one. Granted the unskilled workman and the over-supply of unskilled labor, much can be done through a system of collective bargaining in the way of a fair presentation of the case to the employer that the individual workman could not hope to achieve, and within such limits as improvement is possible organization can bring it. An organization means much too for women because it gives them the business experience of which they stand often in such bitter need, and which through the ages they have been denied, and if properly managed, it should awaken a class interest, a desire to improve what is wrong, not only for themselves, but for those who come after them.

It will be seen in the following pages that there are two different methods of promoting organization. Obviously the ideal method is to make women believe in the righteousness of the cause and the duty of supporting a conscious movement for their betterment. It has, however, become a policy of some unions to persuade the employer that it will be to his advantage to use the union "label" as a means of bidding for union trade; his employees then are compelled to organize whether they want to or not, and are compelled to continue membership in the union or leave

the shop. If it is disappointing to find an element of force instead of a preaching of the gospel of righteousness, it must be remembered that the provocation is great and that the trade unionist is not alone in having seized a cruder instrument because it seemed to bring results more quickly. The very difference in terms is significant. The "closed shop" of the employer is the "union" or "contract shop" of the unionist. It means to the latter that he has risen to the status of a contractor—a bargainer for his share of profit in the enterprise. To him the union label is the outward and visible sign of his entrance into the world of affairs and no misuse of power, no ill-judged action on his part, should blind one to this significance.

In conclusion it should be said that while the progress of organization among women may seem to have been hopelessly slow, it must be remembered that it has been only a short time relatively since the leaders of the movement have realized the necessity of working seriously to organize women; that their wages are so small as to make the obligation of paying even very low dues a burden; and that women with their home duties and family demands have had almost no experience in working together or in the management of a business concern which in some of its aspects a trade organization must necessarily be. And, finally, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that to many women the trade union, with the opportunity that it offers of serving a great cause, and making personal sacrifices for the good of a great class, makes rich with idealism and hope lives that are poor enough in all ways but this. Remembering that "without vision the people perish" this alone should be able to redeem much that it might be easy to question or condemn.

## WOMEN PRINTERS AND THE TYPOGRAPHICAL UNION.

The history of trade unionism in Boston among women in the printing trade is of rather special interest, for two reasons: 1st. Because women have long been identified with the trade; 2d. Because they are skilled workers and, for the most part, intelligent and mature women who might be expected to have a better appreciation of the value of organization than the young, untrained girls in candy and box factories or the unskilled foreign women in the sewing trades.

Just how long the women have been in the trade in Boston it is not easy to say, but probably there were women compositors in some of the offices in the first quarter of the last century—and perhaps much earlier. Miss Martineau mentioned work in the printing offices as one of the occupations open to women when she visited this country in 1836, and statistics show that five years earlier about two hundred women were employed in the various publishing houses of Boston. But however many women there were in the trade, none of them had any part in the organization of the printers union,—now known as Boston Typographical, No. 13,—in the year 1848. The attitude of the men toward women compositors was not friendly at this time, and as late even as 1856 the records of the organization show that the following resolution was prepared (though not carried): "That this society discountenances any member working in any office that employs female compositors, and that any member found doing so be discharged from the society." Within a decade, however, the men had come to see that the women could not be driven from the trade and that the relation of the women to the wage scale must be faced squarely as a part of the problem with which the union had to deal. The following resolutions therefore were passed in 1856:

"Whereas, The impression has gone abroad that this union discountenances the employment of female compositors,

Resolved, That we recommend to the females employed in printing offices in this city to organize in such a man-

ner as shall seem best to themselves, to prevent the present prices paid to them from being lowered, and that in doing so they shall receive the co-operation of this union."

In February, 1870, an attempt was made to form a Women's Typographical Union, but there is no record to show that more than one meeting was ever held, and the women remained unorganized. It was not until sixteen years later that the union again took up the matter of the admission of women compositors, and in 1886, nearly forty years after its formation, twelve women were admitted into membership in Local No. 13. It is of interest to know that all of these women had been members of the Knights of Labor for some years and were by no means recent converts to a belief in organization. In the twenty years that have passed since their names were added to its roll of members, the history of the "Boston Typographical," so far as it relates to women, has been very brief. Because of the large preponderance of men, the long discussions, in which they are not expected to take part, and the smoking, the women find it unpleasant to attend meetings. No woman has ever held an office, and no woman's name appears on the list of delegates that have been sent from time to time to the meetings of the national organization of the American Federation of Labor. In short, while the women are a factor of grave importance in the trade, they are a nullity so far as affairs of the union are concerned.

In 1893 an office in the city which supplied plate matter to small papers came into conflict with the union because of an attempt to install young girls of three months' apprenticeship in the composing room. The attempt was a failure, owing to the vigorous opposition of the union. In the same year, when every man, woman and boy had walked out of the office of the Boston "Telegram,"—a strike that was caused by a cut in wages—much bitterness arose because of the efforts to break the strike by the employment of women. "Herdic loads" of them were said to have been brought in from a "Kindergarten in Cornhill," the term kindergarten indicating, of course, that they were far from having reached the journeyman's standard of excellence. During the two strikes, those of 1904

and 1906, the women have not, on the whole, been as loyal as the men, but the few "faithful among the faithless," have shown great courage and a spirit of self-sacrificing devotion that would be hard to parallel. One of them, who is known to be the most competent woman printer in the city, and who was receiving nineteen dollars a week before the last strike was called, never stopped to question whether she as an individual might not lose all and gain nothing, but went out at once, saying simply that the cause was right, and some of the others would suffer more than she.

These bits of union history serve to show that the woman compositor has seemed at times to block the path of progress, but to those who would blame the women for a selfish lack of foresight in their refusal to join the union or to be loyal to it after they have joined, it must be said that joining the union means to most of these women not an immediate personal gain, but an immediate personal sacrifice. Belonging to the union and being loyal to it means, for them, possessing the finest kind of idealism,—a belief in a cause which requires long devotion, which may cost the individual much and which brings a recompense only in the consciousness of having served one's class.

The difference between the position of the men and the women in the trade which explains the difference in their relations to the union is not so difficult to understand as might at first appear. Printing is a skilled trade. A boy is required to serve a four years' apprenticeship to become a journeyman. There is no chance for the girl to serve such an apprenticeship, however much she desires to become a competent workman. She "steals the trade," therefore, as the men say; that is, she learns it imperfectly instead of undergoing a course of thorough training. She learns only one branch of the trade, "setting up straight matter," and although she may become very efficient in this part of the work, can never be the all-round, efficient printer that the man who comes out of his four years' term of service ought to be. She is handicapped at the start, then, in "looking for a job." She is, in a sense, no matter how ambitious or faithful she may be, "inferior help," and the result is that she is tempted to take a lower wage for fear of getting none at all. The union scale, week work, in

Boston is eighteen dollars for an eight-hour day. Few women are capable of earning this and there are undoubtedly several hundred girls and women in the city who are working for less than ten dollars a week. To these girls coming into the union means the loss of their job, and they refuse to join.

There are other factors working with this which have made the progress of organization slow among the women. Many of the men of the union, while nominally encouraging the organization of women, have been covertly hostile or indifferent, and they have made much less effort to "preach the gospel" to women than to men. The whole history of the union illustrates this. The men found that the women compositors had to be reckoned with. In the first half of the last century the union tried to frown them out of the trade. It then recommended that they form a union of their own, and it was only by long and bitter experience that the men began to see that the non-union woman was a competitor to be treated like the non-union man, and it is questionable whether most of the men see it today.

It would be hard to find a situation more discouraging, in many ways, than the disorganized condition of the women in the printing trade. They are now admitted to the union on the same terms as the men, they pay the same dues and receive the same benefits. The union sees its only safety in maintaining the principle of equal pay for men and women and it is maintained resolutely. But very few women, an insignificant percentage of the total number in the trade, become members.

The difficulty, however, is not without a remedy. One of the greatest obstacles, as has been pointed out, is this very principle of equal pay, when the women are not capable of equal work, and it can be overcome only by recognizing it as fundamental that if women are to compete with men, they must be given the same training as men. If girls as well as boys are going to enter industrial life they must be trained to enter it self-respectingly.

Trained efficiency and a workmanlike ideal, and all that is essentially hopeless disappears from the situation.

## THE WOMEN BOOKBINDERS' UNION.

The book-binding industry lends itself to a carefully drawn line of distinction between "women's work" and "men's work." There would seem in many cases to be no reason for this save a desire to follow in the paths of tradition. A spirited discussion that was once overheard between representatives of the women's and men's organizations as to whether "the boss or the union" had made work on a certain new machine "a man's job" indicates that the line of delimitation is an arbitrary, rather than a necessary one. A further reason for this line between the men and women in the trade is that the men serve a four years' apprenticeship and the women none at all. There is not, in any part of the work, direct competition between men and women. The result of this is, of course, that men and women are in separate local unions, which have no official connection, although both are affiliated with the same national organization. The men's union is much older and the members pay higher dues and receive larger benefits than in the women's. Except for the fact that the average of intelligence is quite as high among the women as among the men, the difference between the two organizations is much like differences usually found between unions in skilled and those in unskilled trades. It must not, however, be inferred that all of the "women's work" is unskilled. Sewing the backs of the books, for example, requires not only experience and training, but considerable intelligence as well. If this part of the work were a "man's job," it would command good wages.

There was no movement for organization among the women until about a decade ago, when there came to be a demand for the label and a chance to organize through that means. In the year 1896 the union, which is still in existence, was granted a charter. There were originally only fifteen members,—all of the women employed in the shop which wished to use the label,—and after ten years the number is still very small, almost incredibly small in proportion to the total number in the trade, for Boston has long been a great book-binding center. Representatives of the union have a voice in the "allied printing trades

council," and the familiar label cannot be used unless the "bindery girls" in the shop join the union.

There has been from the beginning some friction between the women's and men's organizations—a subject difficult to discuss without prejudice. The men and women of course have separate wage scales, and it has been charged that the men have persistently discouraged any attempt on the part of the women to raise their scale—which is, of course, much lower than the men's, because of a feeling on the part of the men that they would get what the women didn't. The result, it has been claimed, is, that while "average wages" in the trade may have improved, the whole loaf has gone to the men. It must in all fairness be said that the men disclaim having followed a selfish policy, but it is undeniable that their own union, which is a very strong one, has not, to say the least, shown a spirit of generosity in giving moral support to the new and struggling union among the women.

One of the great drawbacks to organization has been the removal of several large establishments to towns nearby. There, it is said, "the boss gets the natives to work cheap; the natives think the boss 'made them,' and of course he's a great man. They go to the boss's Sunday School and the boss has Fourth of July celebrations. Generally and all round, the boss is the whole thing. The girls all live at home and don't care anything about the condition of the trade as a whole, and attempts to organize them are fruitless."

In the union that exists, however, there is a fine spirit of loyalty. While it was in origin a label union, yet many of the women who now belong are firm believers in "the movement," and have a conscious pride in its history. They serve because they believe and not because they hope to be served in turn.

In some cases very marked benefits have come through the organization. Shorter hours and higher wages, and the small dues (twenty-five cents a month and an initiation fee of one dollar) give a death benefit of fifty dollars through the national organization. The union has been fortunate in having among its members some of the strongest women in the trade union movement.

## THE TWO UNIONS AMONG THE LAUNDRY WORKERS.

If industrial regeneration is to come through organization, there is certainly pressing need for it among the laundry workers. Conditions in the trade are almost invariably bad. On its sanitary side the industry is badly neglected. Few precautions are taken to make the handling of soiled linen less unhygienic for the "markers" and "sorters." Many of the mangles and others parts of the machinery are not properly safeguarded. Rooms are badly ventilated, and pressure on a few days and in certain seasons makes the hours often very irregular. An attempt has been made to remedy some of these evils by legislation, but the factory laws have not so far been very effective, and it now remains to be seen whether or not the workers can do something for themselves. The backward conditions in the industry are undoubtedly due in part to the fact that it was belated in leaving the home and has not had time to "grow up" properly. Much of the work is unskilled and except for the running of the heavy washing machines is practically done by women.

The first union, which was organized in 1896, had a unique and interesting history. The momentum came, not through the compulsion of the label, but because of a belief in organization as the one means by which the employees could improve conditions in the trade. A woman who had been instrumental in the formation of the Garment Workers' and Bindery Women's Unions, who came from the west, where, as an old Hull House habitue, she had organized the first bindery girls' union in Chicago, went about at this time from laundry to laundry, "preaching the gospel" with great enthusiasm. The result was the formation of a union of nearly one hundred members in its first year. Conditions seemed so hopelessly bad at the time that they came to believe that the only way out was to start a laundry of their own. They hoped to get work from union men, and plans for the enterprise were developed rapidly. The union gave a ball, and with the proceeds added to their fund they started a co-operative laundry, which they were able to run for three months. It

failed, as other such attempts have failed, because none of the members had had any business experience. Great courage and devotion were shown by some of the women, who worked early and late, trying to establish the laundry on a paying basis. One woman used to begin work at four or five o'clock in the morning and work late into the night trying to turn out the work promptly and in some way help meet expenses. Some who could not, without sacrificing others as well as themselves, give up their positions, came over and worked in the evening when their own work was done, or early in the morning before it began. When they saw that it was all hopeless and that the laundry would have to be given up, they gave up the union too, as they grew gradually more discouraged, but the thing that they have never given up is their belief in the righteousness of the cause itself.

The present organization is one of the most recent of the women's unions in Boston, and owes its existence, as do many others, to the value of the label as a means of commanding "union trade." It was organized in a laundry which makes a specialty of barbers' and waiters' coats and aprons, and was favored by the employer as a means of increasing patronage. There were at the outset about forty-five members, but the number has nearly tripled in three years. The membership is increased, not by converting the women to a belief in the value of organization, but by converting employers to a belief in the value of the label. While the idealism of the former method is lacking at the outset, it is often possible to develop it later, and there is always a hope that women who originally came in because they had to "join or quit," may come to be helpful and loyal members. The dues are necessarily small (twenty-five cents a month) and there are no benefits. The union is affiliated with the International Shirt Waist and Laundry Workers' Union, and with the American Federation of Labor.

Although it is too soon to look for "results," it may be said that conditions in the original union laundry have improved,—a nine hour day and a minimum wage of six dollars have been established.

## THE LOCAL UNION AMONG THE HAT TRIMMERS.

In the making of felt hats, the "trimming" is exclusively women's work, and the industry in Boston, which is a relatively small one, is so thoroughly organized that all of the women in the trade are in the union. But in the trade the employers have recognized the commercial value of the union label, and the closed shop agreement has made the union. There are, however, in this as in other such organizations, some women who believe whole-heartedly in the cause, and who would support the union, label or no label.

The Hat Trimmers' Union was formed in 1886 and joined the Knights of Labor as an organization that same year. The influence of the individual has been strong here, for the affiliation with the "Knights" was attributed solely to the influence of one man who was an active "Knight" himself, and who was able to carry with him first his whole shop and later the trade. The organization now is only a local union, affiliated neither with the American Federation of Labor nor with a national organization in the trade. The union among the men, who monopolize the work of making the hats, is one which strongly supports the closed shop policy and makes effective use of the "Hatters' Label." The necessity of organizing the women is recognized by the men, and there is an unwritten agreement between the men's and women's unions to the effect that if there is any trouble the men will "stand by" the women and the women by the men. Dues for the women are extremely small,—only fifteen cents a quarter, but assessments are sometimes made and a death benefit of fifty dollars is maintained.

This organization among the hatters is the oldest women's union in Boston, but it has had a very passive history, and is by no means the largest one at the present time. The original membership of one hundred has increased to 175, the closed shop agreement keeping the growth of the union equal to the growth of the trade. There have been no strikes and no conspicuous controversies. Unfortunately, the union has lacked throughout its history the in-

spiration which comes through association with a national organization. Such an association brings with it a belief in the larger value of the movement that comes in no other way.

## WOMEN IN THE CIGAR MAKERS' AND CIGAR PACKERS' UNIONS.

The situation in the cigar making industry is in many respects unique. The trade is so thoroughly organized that practically every cigar maker in Boston is in the union. There is no tenement work and wages are higher and hours are shorter than in any other city, east or west. There are, however, relatively fewer women in the Boston trade than elsewhere.

A three years' apprenticeship is required, and although there is no union rule against it, it is very rare to find a girl serving a term. Last winter there were between 150 and 200 boys and but one girl apprenticed here, and the one girl was serving in the small shop of a relative.

The women cigar makers, then, are almost without exception, foreigners who have learned the trade, either in London or on the continent. They understand very little of what organization means and belong to the union because the closed shop contracts are in force and it is the only way they can "keep their jobs." The men so outnumber the women that the situation is in some respects much like that in the Typographical Union,—it is really a men's organization, officered and managed by men, but having a few women members who do not attend the meetings. But the women cigar makers who have been trained abroad are really as efficient as the men, and the maintenance by the union of the same wage scale for both women and men has been a very great advantage to the women.

What has been said of the relations of the women cigar makers to the trade and the union is also true of the women engaged in cigar packing—a separate trade with a separate union. There are not more than two or three women packers in the city. They get very good wages indeed, belong to the union, but pay the fine for non-attendance rather than go to the meetings. As one of them said, "the Union is a place for men, but it has helped me and I ought to belong."

## THE TOBACCO STRIPPERS' UNION.

The organization among the cigar factory tobacco strippers is the largest and most interesting women's union in the city, and one that furnishes an admirable example of what the women in a trade can do to improve their own condition. The union originated as a means of remedying a pressing grievance, but the trade contained an unusually large proportion of intelligent, energetic women who had long been convinced of the necessity of an organization, and who were able to hold the union together, even after the immediate need for it had passed. Unionism was not a new thing to many of these women. Some of them were daughters and sisters of unionists and familiar with union principles; others had belonged to the Knights of Labor in the eighties. In 1890 a definite attempt was made to organize, but it seemed impossible to interest the girls.

Conditions in the trade, however, were steadily deteriorating. There were, among others, two chief grievances: 1. The stock was bad, which, of course, made piece work earnings relatively much lower; 2. Although the employees were paid according to the amount of tobacco stripped, the stock was weighed for them and they had no way of computing the wages due them at the end of the week. There were frequent complaints of unfair weighing, and many of the women believed they were being paid less than they earned. For this reason and because of the low scale, wages were very unsatisfactory.

Finally, in the fall of 1899, a spirited and independent girl in one of the large factories complained to the foreman of unfair treatment in the weighing of her stock. She was discharged at once, but all of the girls in the factory went with her and marched in a body down across the Common to the headquarters of the Cigar Makers' Union. The difficulty was finally adjusted in favor of the girls, and fortunately the opportunity of organizing was not lost. At a mass meeting of all the tobacco strippers in the city, the present union was formed. Originally there were about three hundred members, but the number has now reached nearly seven hundred. The closed shop prevails, and while none of the members was originally forced in by this

means, there are undoubtedly a good many members today who belong only because they are obliged to. This is not strange when one remembers that a large number of nationalities are represented in the trade, and that many of the women do not speak English. The union, however, has conferred such direct and unmistakable benefits that only an extreme lack of understanding can explain a failure to support it. The eight-hour day exists throughout the city with a Saturday half-holiday in the summer. The wage scale has been very materially increased and a fair system of weighing stock is now in force. There are some incidental benefits too which should not be overlooked. An agreement exists between the union and the employers which cannot be broken by either party without a month's notice. Moreover, the employer deals now with the union and not with the individual, and complaints are made and adjusted with little difficulty. Very useful business experience has been gained too by the women who have been the leaders in the signing of important business agreements and in the organization and maintenance of a system of benefits. The dues are fifty cents a month; both sick and death benefits are paid, and special help is given to members in distress.

With regard to the form of organization, it is of interest to know that while the moral support of the cigar makers' union has been very helpful, still the men have had no official connection with the union, which is an independent local, affiliated only with the American Federation of Labor. Not being affiliated with the cigar makers' union a great embarrassment arose at the time of the last cigar makers' strike. Technically the strippers were not on strike—only out of work, and therefore could not touch their defense fund. It has been from start to finish an independent women's organization, officered, financed, developed and maintained by a group of capable and enthusiastic women.

To successfully manage a business organization of seven hundred members is to achieve something, but to train seven hundred persons of different races and creeds to work together and to believe in and be loyal to a great class movement is to achieve much more; and the tobacco strippers have gone a long way towards doing both.

## ORGANIZATIONS AMONG THE GARMENT WORKERS.

In attempting organization in the sewing trades one is confronted not with a single problem, but with a series of problems. A trade union among house finishers is as different from a trade union among coat makers, as a teamsters' organization is different from a railway brotherhood. The term "Garment Makers" covers all grades of skill and almost all possible nationalities, and, as everywhere, the groups most difficult to unionize is the group most victimized, because it is the largest, most unskilled, and most un-American.

It is necessary, then, in discussing the sewing trades to give separate accounts of each of the unions in the city affiliated with the United Garment Workers of America, and an account also of such organizations as have been attempted among the makers of women's ready-made clothing,—organizations which were affiliated with the Ladies' Garment Workers, and of which no trace now remains, save sixty-five dollars in the treasury of the defunct Wrapper Makers' Union.

In Boston, the following organizations among the makers of men's and boys' "ready to wear" garments have women members: (1) Overall and Sheepskin Workers' Unions; (2) Pressmen's Union; (3) Coat Makers' Union; (4) Pants Makers' Union; (5) Vest Makers' Union. Only men belong to the unions among the cutters, cap makers and knee pants makers.

### *(1). Overall and Sheepskin Workers' Union.*

By far the most interesting organization in this group and the most hopeful one so far as the women are concerned, is the "Overall Makers' Union," as it is commonly called. Ninety per cent. of the employees in the trade are women, who dominate also in affairs of the union. Not only are the important local officers,—president, secretary, and business agent—women, but even the business agent for the national organization is a woman, who signs important contracts with the largest firms in the country.

"Boston Local No. 163" was organized in 1901, because working men who were unionists had begun to demand a union label on overalls. At first the union included only the employees of the single house that used the label. Two years later, one of the makers of men's sheepskin coats which are used by teamsters, found that the label was in demand, and he at once organized his factory. These sheepskin workers, though forced in by the label, developed into very enthusiastic supporters of the union, and if the closed shop agreement were given up today at least two-thirds of them would voluntarily retain their membership. These women more than those from the overall factories (some others of which are now unionized) are devoted adherents of "the movement," and yet no direct material benefits have come to them personally. While wages in the overall trade have been increased, the sheepskin workers receive the same pay and work the same number of hours as before, though the label has increased their employer's business by one-third. Their dues for the support of the organization are thirty cents a month and there are no "benefits." Indeed it would be hard to find a clearer case of desiring to promote a cause for the sake of the cause alone.

Eight months after these sheepskin workers came into the union, the national organization ordered that the charter be given up and that the members join a union of rubber workers which had just started and was composed of twenty or thirty men. The women objected strongly, and taxed every member in the shop a dollar in order to send two women on to have a conference with the national officers in New York, where, fortunately, they were able to carry their point. They said they were willing, if it seemed best, to take the men into their organization, but they were unwilling to give up their identity, and they won their point. It is worth noting, too, that this union has maintained its business relations on an irreproachable plane. When a chance came to increase the membership roll by unionizing the shop of a questionable firm, the union refused to do it, although considerable pressure was brought to bear by men in other unions, to whom it seemed "bad business" to refuse.

This union, which began in 1901 with the unionizing of a shop of fifty-six employees, now has about three hundred members, twenty-five of whom are men. The men in the trade do the cutting and part of the stitching on the skin coats. Some of the work on these coats is very heavy and beyond the strength of most women. In addition to the employees in the overall and sheepskin coat factories, the union has some members engaged in the making of duck coats. They were obliged to join too, through the label, in order that the employer might sell his coats to union barbers, bartenders and waiters. These women, about thirty in number, with a single exception, take no interest in the union, but the one woman who makes the exception is one of the most loyal union women in the city, and will always be glad to serve, quite regardless of the label or any other sign of compulsion.

By way of summary, it may be pointed out that this rather miscellaneous organization of overall makers, sheepskin workers and duck coat makers is in some respects a very interesting one. It has been from the beginning a "label union," forced to organize and to maintain an organization in order that the employer might get union trade. Yet among these three hundred women who were forced into the labor movement is a very strong nucleus of those who understand and believe in the movement and will always stand by their colors. It is just this that redeems the label union, for out of every such organization come some "true believers" who will never be recreant to a faith that is strong within them.

## *(2.) Coats, Pants, and Vest Makers' Unions and the Pressmen's Union.*

The women who are employed in making men's clothing are machine operators, pressers, basters, finishers, and the like. The cutting, the most skilled and best paid occupation in the trade, is "men's work." Originally this was because the work was extremely heavy, but since the new electric cutting knife has come into use there is no reason why women should not be employed in this occupation. However, the fact that they are now excluded from it is

one explanation of the preponderance of men among organized garment workers, for it is always the skilled part of the trade that is easiest to unionize.

The first union among the women garment workers was formed more than a decade ago. The men in the trade had struck for higher wages and a union shop. The women were necessarily thrown out of work, and as they sympathized with the men, they formed an organization supporting the demands of the men's union. This early union had seven or eight hundred women members, and was very prosperous for two years, at the end of which time it went to pieces. The reason for its failure is interesting. The manager of one of the large department stores had come to union headquarters during the strike and offered to grant the demands of the union without signing a contract. The union officers, quick to see the effect the press headlines, "Demands of Garment Workers Granted by Large Employer" would have on the smaller firms, accepted the terms, and the strike was soon broken. The union gained a nine-hour day, an increase in wages, and the establishment of a minimum wage of a dollar a day for women. After two years, one of the contractors of the department store that had first yielded, broke the agreement. Then the firm that previously had used its balance of power to the advantage of the strikers, now refused to grant the demands of the workers, and as there was no signed contract, the union had no redress. A strike was called, and the firm boycotted. An injunction followed, but the court decided in favor of the strikers,—a decision that was later reversed. The firm then played its trump card. A notice was posted that everyone employed in any of their workrooms in Boston must join their Employees' Association or quit work. A general strike at this time would have only resulted in failure. The president, a woman still influential in "the movement," said that she had not recovered from the hard times of 1893 and '94, and she couldn't advise the women to take the risks involved in giving up their jobs. They joined the Employees' Association, and it soon developed that membership in the union was inconsistent with this new obligation, and that one or the other must be given up. It was a case of sacrificing their "jobs" or the union at a time

when "jobs" were scarce, and they gave up the union, though most of them honestly believed in it.

No accurate history of unionism among the tailoring trades of Boston could fail to note the effect of the Russian Jewish immigration, which began in the early nineties. By tradition many of these immigrants regarded the clothing trade as an occupation to which they were adapted. Their standards of living were not those of American workmen and their advent at a time when the country was undergoing a financial panic, created one of the too familiar tragedies which prove how world-wide is the problem of industrial betterment.

No other attempt was made to organize the women in the trade until 1901, when five or six hundred coat, pants and vest workers were brought into one union in order that the label might be used. Most of these women were foreigners, who could not speak English, and who had not the smallest understanding of what organization meant. They took no interest in the affairs of the union and practically never came to meetings. The president and secretary, the two Irish-American officers, transacted all of the business, the president also acting as business agent. There is little doubt that many of the women worked below the scale and that the organization did not mean much to them. The men felt that the women were bidding below the scale and that the union was being used as a tool to further the personal ends of a few. They declared that an organization of this sort, where there was no "union spirit," was worse than none, and that it might as well go to pieces.

After it was dissolved in 1903 an effort was at once made by the men in the Coat, Pants and Vest Makers' Unions to get these same women into the unions with them, but few of the women who belonged to the old union have ever joined any one of these men's locals.

The men have a most difficult problem to face. They try to maintain the same wage scale for both men and women, and to protect the rights of the women employees; but it is difficult to do either of these things so long as the women refuse to come into the organization. An officer of one of these unions complained that the women came

to the men and asked to have the union interfere when "the boss had treated them unfairly. They are always being worked over hours, and now and then the bosses will take a woman by the neck and throw her out. But we keep on telling the women that if they want us to help them they've got to come into the union."

At the present time there are about twenty-five women in the coat makers' local, a large organization of five hundred members, and these twenty-five are there because they work in "label shops." In the pressmen's union there are now three women members, an interesting fact because pressing, like cutting, is very generally considered "men's work." One of these women takes a very lively interest in union affairs, and this year ran for the office of "label agent," who gets a regular salary for keeping an oversight of the employers' use of the label.

In the pants and vest makers' locals, the situation is much the same as among the coat makers. Most of the women working on coats are Italians and the majority of the pants and vest workers are Jewish, a very large percentage of whom cannot speak English. They not only do not know how to demand their rights, but they do not know what their rights are. They know that the world goes hard with them, but there seem to be so many difficulties that they have no hope of overcoming them. Moreover the general feeling is that although the men have always stood by the women in the time of a strike and have treated them fairly in the union, yet they are far from being reconciled to women competitors, and often in the shop have almost refused to work with them, and as a result more and more of the work,—even such light work as basting, is being done by men.

Finishing is still largely done at home, though the union is fighting this everywhere, as the cigar makers have fought tenement house work in their trade, but there is the added difficulty here that even when the employers want the women to work on the premises, the latter refuse. This is because the work is very heavy and is left for the older women, to whom leaving home is out of the question, the younger girls preferring to work in "white goods" factories.

### (3.) *Ladies Garment Workers' Unions.*

Four attempts have been made to organize the women employed in the various branches of the women's ready-made clothing industry. These organizations were all the work of the energy and enthusiasm of one man, a resident in a North End Settlement, an old garment worker himself, and at one time an organizer for the National Union. He has had the courage that belongs with faith, and has tried again and again, in spite of repeated discouragements, to interest a wholly apathetic set of people. The making of women's clothing is all done by women, except the cutting, which is still regarded as "men's work." The larger proportion of the women are power-machine operatives and, in nationality, they are largely Jewish. Wages and conditions generally are much better than in the making of men's clothing. There is no strong men's organization to aid the women in forming a union, no persistent and hopeful leader within the trade, and no immediate crying abuse to remedy,—the kind of situation, in short, that is quite hopeless from the point of view of organization.

The first union started was one among the wrapper makers in 1902,—a union that for a time was quite successful, but of which there now remains only an unexpended fund of sixty-five dollars! A union among the shirt-waist makers was formed in 1903, but that too was unsuccessful. In the same year the white goods workers tried to organize during a strike. The girls had been taxed for their machines, and their wage scale was so low that some remedy seemed necessary. The over supply of labor was, however, too great at this time, and no permanent organization was effected. One difficulty in the way of organization in the trade has been the large preponderance of Jewish girls employed. While they are emotional and easily stirred by appeals from an enthusiastic organizer, it is very difficult to hold them together after the union has been once formed. They are, too, very likely to marry young and almost invariably stop work after marriage, so that there is a constant change in the body of employees. On the whole the outlook for organization is scarcely more hopeful in this than in the other branches of the garment making

industry. Here, however, it is not so difficult to start a union as it is to hold one together after it has been formed. The nucleus of faithful and active workers within the trade itself that can be depended on to carry a union through periods of distress is still waiting to be formed.

## MISCELLANEOUS ORGANIZATIONS: — CIGAR- ETTE MAKERS' UNION, MUSICIANS' PRO- TECTIVE ASSOCIATION, AND TELE- GRAPHERS' UNION.

### (1.) *Cigarette Makers' Union.*

In the summer of 1905 there was formed among the cigarette makers a very small union, which is now affiliated with the National Tobacco Workers' Union and with the American Federation of Labor. Two other small organizations had been attempted in 1903 and 1904, but the members were young girls under fifteen, who were not able to manage a union. The present union has fewer than twenty members, both women and men, and the woman who acts as secretary, is the only member who can read, write, or understand English, though some of the men are trying hard to learn. Cigarette making is, however, only a small industry here, and the employees are, most of them, either Jewish or Greek. The union is now a label union, but it was a voluntary organization in the beginning, and the demand for the label was created by the union after it was formed. The union has a plan for a co-operative factory with stock to be sold in small shares, but as yet no steps have been taken to realize it. The dues are fifteen cents a week and a sick benefit of three dollars a week is paid when necessary. In the first year of its history the organization has gained a shorter work day and an increase in wages.

### (2.) *Musicians' and Telegraphers' Organizations.*

Within the last few years women have come into the musicians' and telegraphers' unions, though they form as yet but a small percentage of the total membership. The men, however, have come to recognize that the woman is a dangerous competitor so long as she can underbid them, and they see as the one remedy the necessity of bringing the women into the unions so that they cannot work below the men's wage scale. It is probable, therefore, that a greater effort will be made by the men to bring the women into the trade than has been done heretofore.









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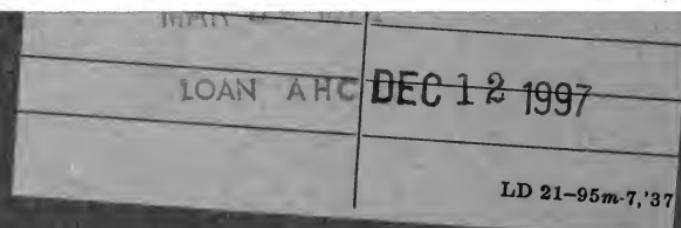
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